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Columbia Poetry Review

Columbia College Chicago

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COLUMBIA

PO ET RY

REVIEW



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no. 17

COLUMBIA PO
ET
RY
REVIEW

Spring 2004

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CONTENTS

JENNA CARDINALE

Collected Works	1
-----------------------	---

WANDA COLEMAN

1959	2
Greening Over Them Blues	3

KATHLEEN OSSIP

Nunc Dimittis	4
---------------------	---

NICK CARBÓ

Dulzura	5
Mis Versos	6
El Hijo de Ibn Ben-Yamin	7
Pelos	8

JENNIFER L. KNOX

A Common American Name	9
Famed Psychic Gardener Flits Through, Gives Tips	10

TONY TRIGILIO

In the Intersection, Jackson and State	12
The Train from San Mateo	13

JORIS SOEDING

Summer of X	14
-------------------	----

MICHAEL DUMANIS

When I Was Pol Pot	15
Tourist	16

KIMI KO OSTROZOVICH

Some Interesting Facts about Japan from a First Grade Girl Scout	17
Although This Never Happened	18

LAURA NEGRETE

Apple Picking	19
---------------------	----

MATTHEW THORBURN

Hot Like Hot Mustard	22
Honeymoon Snapshot	23

MICHAEL SCOTT SUMRAK	
Actuality of	24
Flight of	25
AMY GERSTLER	
In the Aspirin Orchard	26
White Blindfold	28
SUSAN KUREK	
Chinese New Year	29
Truth #	30
CONSTANTIN ACOSMEI	
Ars Amandi	31
GENE TANTA	
Men with Mustaches	32
RAE GOUIRAND	
Imprimatur	33
MAGGIE LOPEZ	
Fixed	35
SORAYA SHALFOROOSH	
Psychic	36
JORGE SANCHEZ	
Fantasia on the Machine	37
JOHN STEVEN CUMMINS	
The Architectural Tour on the Misspelled River	38
What to Wear, Alice?	39
MAUREEN SEATON	
When I Was a Sex Goddess	40
Traveling by Hand	41
KAREN VOLKMAN	
11/2	45
11/8	46
LAURA SIMS	
Spin	48
Notes	49
TIMOTHY LIU	
A Song of the South	50

JACOB SAENZ	
Cops and Robbers	.51
P. KOBYLARZ	
Prelude, no Fugue	.53
MINNIE BRUCE PRATT	
The Fretwork of Bone	.54
Breakfast Again: The Interpenetration of Opposites	.55
CHAD BARTLETT	
Wormwood	.56
MARCUS SLEASE	
Stop Pretending	.57
RITA WONG	
you know before you begin that you are	
already finished	.58
JOHN FRANKLIN	
Vincent Goes To Paris	.59
J. Jablonski	.60
PASQUALE DEFAZIO	
HWY	.61
KRISTY BOWEN	
Souvenir	.63
C.H.E.	
document, erasures: aeiou, sometimes y words	.64
document, 11-8-03: Kingsley, Michigan	.65
ARI BANIAS	
Two Dreams of Deluge	.66
KEVIN CUNNINGHAM	
Hermit age	.67
ROBERT SIEK	
Turkey on Saturday	.68
MARK CUNNINGHAM	
V	.70
CHRIS HUND	
Ninja Movie	.71
SUSAN MAURER	
El Lobo	.72

KAREN GARTHE	
The History of Midnight	.73
ROBERT BAKER	
My Movie	.74
REBECCA BRIDGE	
Beautiful in the Oven	.76
DAPHNE GOTTLIEB	
female trouble	.77
Everything She Asks of Me	.80
NATHAN HOKS	
Interrogative	.82
LUIS VALADEZ	
Can't be Cured by Anne Sexton	.83
NOLAN CHESSMAN	
Butterflies on Indoor Plants	.85
They Who Lie Trapped in the Sidewalk Cracks	.86
JOSHUA COREY	
from <i>Severance Songs</i>	.88
JIM CORY	
Of 'of'	.89
CHRIS GREEN	
A Dog Named Soul	.90
NATALIE HILL	
What Frank Told Me	.91
Heaven Night Club	.92
ARTURO R. ALMAZAN	
mex to go	.93
LAUREN IRELAND	
The Little Broken Parrot on the Floor	.94
JEAN KIM	
Catching Five Days	.95
KIMBERLY MANOR	
Wonderment at the Waterfront	.96
LIZ BERLAND	
a feminine fix-it handbook	.97

SANDRA MILLER	
Sirens from a wedding	.98
LAURA MULLEN	
The Squeaky Wheel	.99
KERRI SONNENBERG	
from <i>The Winter Count</i>	.100
LINDA OH	
Girls, Cutting, Everything	.101
KAREN LEE OSBORNE	
Ruth from Linden	.104
JULIUS FLYNN	
Right Before Bible Study with Pasta' Larry	.106
CLAUDIA ALONZO	
If I only had a heart	.108
MAUREEN OWEN	
not every restaurant that attracts celebrities	
has an attitude	.109
CHRIS PAQUETTE	
Deer Crossing	.110
"Where did you get your red hair little boy?"	.111
ELIJAH PARK	
Road in the Fork	.112
RYAN RZAB	
Crotcho	.113
KRISTIN AARDSMA	
fathers aren't Gods, either	.114
A.F. THOMAS	
Tree House	.115
CACONRAD	
3 Imperfect Rituals	.116
conversation poem	.117

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RY
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Collected Works

Niedecker holds the shaking
new goose with straight
fingers, palms life

by water. Writes
the shortest letters before
the modern feminist

movement. Omissions
are not accidents. I was
born on an island, too.

The marriage effectively
ends. That's the depression
of the loud image.

She refers to the surrealists
and the material qualities
of words. She sleeps

with a pencil
and Zukofsky, falls
pregnant. She is supplied

with a reading list, a sense
of shared endeavor. They cross
genres—else why write?

A guide to the badger state
is written blind, but she sees
Paul and the personal, the housepainter.

Then the tongue, the tenderness—
the groove, the gristle. The harpsichord
and salt fish. A regular in little.

1959

it is the year of love-eyed vixens with paper cheechees
 plaids, pleats, and Hawaiian-print polished cotton
 bus rides on the red line, south to Gompers Junior High

oxfords are good for hopscotch, or scuffles at
 recess, or long walks home made longer by gossiping
 with girls named Dee, Jill or Nancy, or twisting
 fingers with boys named Oscar, Wayland or Red

(white or black patent leather is reserved for church service and concerts)

i engage in scopings for mange-free strays to adopt,
 or the scooping up of broke-winged birds for burial,
 stopping for a soda a burger a comic book, wasting
 a week's allowance in stingy quarters and dimes

"cooling it" on the porch when summer scorches the sidewalks,
 admiring the whoosh of big-finned convertibles & coupes

on dinner duty for Moms, as she does a last-minute shop
 (morning screams from the hallway still in my ears,
 awakened to kill the earthworm trapped in newswrap. bruises
 from spankings like blueberries under my skin. the marks
 white teachers never notice. how can such an angel-faced creature
 be such a violent bitch? and here i am her bittersweet spit)

on phone duty for Pops (ever absent without leave), collecting maydays
 from the ships that never sail

living on books, in this revisiting, sometimes leaving loneliness
 for skate blisters and the laughter-and-shouts of neighbor kids
 between ooobopshebop sways and swings between bike rides,
 foul shots and hikes to the corner store for milk, bread and syrup

a cooking ironing mopping scrubbing sewing washing fool

the fragrance of wet grass ever rises on breezes, sates my nose
 as i hose our lawn every evening at sundown. it will permeate
 those dreams ahead. for now, i am content to watch the western
 sky go rose go violet blue as all rainbows vanish in the spray

Greening Over Them Blues

maybe it is 1969 and i'm showing too much leg while
droppin' dimes in that phone booth on South Broadway, USA
the slip and glide of my attitude matching the eternal wiggle
of my hips as i slide into a day laborer's dreamscape

my faux bouffant a massive snarl of brown-bomber curls
paisley angel top hugging my ribs from A to navel
as i TKO eyeballs with a four-four strut, inviting
slow rides on the mercy seat and smooches in F sharp

maybe it is that last day of the week of the last wait

whatever it is, Lord Alice has defined it with his croon
that juicy mambo combo backing up every *oooh*
with a rose of red satin refrain—as freshly plucked thorns bleed
the final sigh from a universal klatch of cold soul survivors

those luscious liverlips smacking until the goosebumps rise
a response to memories of lovers begging *improvise*

baby—I'm steeped in the sounds of my wild wild youth
my shoulders locked to the lead guitar strum, the
whisk whipping my heart via ears, a verdant profusion
of warm coronets, tapping fingers and toes, moans on cue

then

his lips scat through my center
turn me the color of dang the color of jesusgodomighty

Nunc Dimittis

The kid spent the seder whacking himself. Whacking with his sippy cup, whacking with a plastic spider, whacking with his dimpling of a fist. Whacking on the knee, whacking in the gut, whacking on the noggin.

Course after course: matzoh ball soup, hard boiled eggs, gefilte fish. The kid would nibble at each (turning almost an identical purple when his uncle teased him with a taste of horseradish), then go back to whacking.

'Z eaten too much play-doh, said one of the cousins, the mouthy one.

Use your words, the kid's mother repeated to him, between the reading of dumbed-down sacred texts, the co-opting of Negro spirituals (Let my people go). But the kid didn't have all that many words, he was only 18 months.

And he's a bully at daycare, announced his dad, proudly.

Get me out of here, his ten-year-old sister begged. Brisket, tzimmes, kugel. The kid whacked some more. A different uncle assured the parents: That's what kids do. His wife (she hadn't been able to conceive) muttered, What demented kids do.

A fruit platter, Edenic. Macaroons and poppy cake. Then a vicious whack on his creamy forehead with the spout of the cup. Jesus! shrieked the mom. Did that one draw blood?

[The curse of narcissism in our culture. Who among us is truly open to taking in another?]

They were going to look for the hidden afikomen now, but the kid was too young, he was only 18 months. In the TV room, *Blue's Clues* had been turned on for him. He sat in front of it, his eyes fixed, whacking. Don't hurt yourself, the grandma begged. Be good to yourself.

Dulzura

*"Treat with sweetness the one that can cause you harm
and accompany him to the door of your house.*

In this world all is an illusion.

You must fawn over the person you fear the most."

—Abu Utman S ad b. Luyun (1282–1349)

The one who could hurt me most
would be El Amin the butcher,
the finest cut of his blade
does not compare to how
he has been eyeing my wife
since the last night of Ramadan.

Tomorrow, I will bring him
a box of frankincense.

Mis Versos

*"But my contemporaries are displeased
with my prose and my verses just like
a sword is displeased being
in the sheath carried by a coward."*

—Abd al Samad

They don't repeat my verses at the baths
or around the fountains in Almeria anymore.

My words had travelled by horse and donkey
as far as Cordoba, my phrases even pleased

the purple flowers of the Alhambra. A boy before
his manhood will never hear my Song to Sulaiman.

El Hijo de Ibn Ben-Yamin

He is the eldest son
of the silversmith Ibn Ben-Yamin.
I was looking for something to celebrate
my appointment as chief architect
of the new Alcazaba and I walked
into this little shop next to the bath houses.

Our hands only touched briefly
as he slipped a ring with rubies
on my finger. I must design a fountain
for the central patio that murmurs
his name day and night.

Pelos

*"Heavens! Since the day that destiny has separated us,
my temples have turned gray!"*

—Ali ibn Muhammad ibn Jatima, al-Ansari

I have white rabbits running around
my dreams at night. See the streaks
they leave on my temples? You! You put
them there so I would never forget
the lines of your face as you bent
to lick my belly button.

A Common American Name

It's December, there's a blizzard,
and I'm going swimming at the Greenpoint Y.
Five young African men in scuffed down vests
huddle in the hallway around an old vending machine
while the receptionist punches the buttons and yanks the knobs.
There's nothing left in there but licorice ropes and Lifesavers,
and not until I'm squeezing by do I notice the men
have no forearms—nothing from the elbow down.
“Have a great swim, Jen!” she calls to me,
wide-eyed as a hostage, her voice high and tight—
the same woman who normally no more than grunts
when I walk by—who has never called my name before.
I know hers too—it's also Jen (short for *Jennifer*,
a Welsh form of *Guinevere* meaning pure, white wave).

Famed Psychic Gardener Flits Through, Gives Tips

In light of the upcoming time change,
she dropped by with bunches of tulips:
one red with gold, one orange with green;
both showy and obviously French.

She was always doing stuff like that:
tornado sirens hooing away
and she's off looting blue peonies,
or tying sage to my tabby's tail
to ward off dogs and bouts of ennui.

Parties, parties, parties, and parties...
yet she kept her fluids up, brought down
white birdies sailing o'er the great

white net. I asked her about my peas:
to freeze them or let them get greener?
to fry them with onions in oil
or steam them? She asked, "Do you hear that?"

it's the sound of your pods ripening.
Let their zippers tell you how to do."

But what of my orchids? Should I splice
prize-winning Guatemalan Green Squids
with novice Australian Cat Faces?
"Jauntiest kings of deception, bad

flowers, the *epidendrum cochleatum*
and *diuris filifolia*.

These emit pheromones, read our minds.
Encourage not their waxy, forked tongues."

Gesturing to the tree beyond the wall
I asked, what kind—with its giant blooms
pink as pussycats inside and white
at the tips of its petals? “Go now,”

she said, “and bury some fish beneath
its webby black canopy—golden
ones, still with eyes—oily carp or koi.”

In the Intersection, Jackson and State

Without looking, I could cross Jackson
without getting struck, guided by voices, a hum
of tires on coarse pavement. I want to scale
one of those slopes, the blushed steel
of the CNA Building, grab the Monadnock's
frayed terra cotta drapery and climb.

Lakeside wind so loud it changes the subject.
In dreams, I lie too long on spring grass, pikes
still dead despite thaw. Ants crawl my arms,
bees swarm. Nature an antique, an abandoned
oak table behind glass, waiting for me
to test its legs, barter a price.

I'm afraid of nature. Orange, Brown Line
trains cross paths, the distant touch of negotiators.
Rivers changing course, office windows bound in mist.
Pavement accumulates, dismantles, rises; an array of noise
come again. One block east, a construction crew
is drilling, their hammers lift from State like smoke.

The Train from San Mateo

wants to speak,
probes for boundaries,
for horizon, until

the right words
find a seam.
The hills listen,

stubbled, a fine
fuzz, patient like
hairs on the

back of fingers.
Hills arch, hearts
still as reptiles.

Gimp scrubs wince
at the sun.
It says, "I'm

sticking with you,"
as if these
are the only

words it knows,
all trains lost
in that sweet,

lovesick spot in
your chest where
you can't see

the mirror wink,
and the shrug
of its loping

shoulders makes no
sense to you
anymore.

Summer of X

I.

This is after learning the world isn't flat
some ledge that finishes my first walks in woods

this is after picturing God unshaven—sitting behind knobs and levers
the desk to everyone's thoughts, dirty ones arriving hopefully on lunch hour

this is after glancing the white under Lauren Vincenti's
red plaid skirt on schoolbus 25

this is after untying a noose that would have strangled the moon
instead I noticed once more, how unordinary—this night and face without
a neck

this is after all the ladybugs
arrived in solitaire or swarm

II.

Ruth introduced me to the agents and
like everything else, I was four years late
with Meghan at side without static
reminded of good television
I fell in love leaning on a couch in front of kitchen

III.

Soon enough the speeding began
eleven o'clock pm—twenty above the limit
not once getting pulled over so it must've been meant to be
catching music that later was the answering machine message
with every clumsy entrance
this is when showers had desperation
scrubbing off sweat and scents (bleach, pizza dough, cigarettes)
prompt for a change, unsoaped in under two minutes
opening credits always in a blue towel
until the second commercials, pajamas
two reruns on nights off
a four-, sometimes six-, sometimes twelve-hour marathon when lucky
all of this Monday through Friday

When I Was Pol Pot

While the uncommon
music fogged past smiles,
I was wish-slender,
mango-round and flawed,
perfect and breathing
communal soup-warm,
and not wanting to
lie, while stray casings
and slight trunks of trees
lined each avenue
in this not common
singsong of Pnomh Penh,
where I liked cream-filled
sweets, and found myself
in glass, face gracing
each vitrine, and lay
through dreams of flying,
and stayed scared, while this
common unmusic
whined, of everything
I did not know, and
sanctioned more than one
fire, mosquito,
unwinding, and grave.

Tourist

I chose to disregard
the Plague of Thebes,
the crowd of bees, the shadow
boxing tournament.

Forgot what terror meant.
Drank Coca-Cola
in flagrant violation of the law,
and glanced at stones,

went on about my business.
But, having thumbed
through my phrasebook and found
the terms *paramour*, *loss*

of composure, and *curtsey*,
I made the effort to love some
not-me like a one-legged man
loves his one leg.

I applied much mascara
in anticipation, affected
the postures and faces
prescribed by my *Rough Guide*.

How is it I figured
time for a step forward?
I went to a bar
and then one more bar

and then I went home,
and he who I thought
would not follow me,
followed me.

Some Interesting Facts about Japan from a First Grade Girl Scout

Japan
is an island
in the pacific Ocean.
There is one
main island
and three sm-
aller islands.
The land
would fit
on the east coast
of the U.S.A.
but it has
15 times
the people.
Bamboo
grows all over
Japan.
Bamboo
has many
different uses.
It can be used
to build houses,
make boats,
make fishing poles,
and some people eat
the baby bam-
booplants.
Kimonos
are worn
sometimes
but most people dress
like we do.
rice
is very important
to the people
that live in
japan It
is their main dish.

Although This Never Happened

When you were one, I saw you at the zoo.

(Not really, but just go with it, okay?)

When I saw you there in your stroller you were very handsome. I thought that someday it would be nice to meet you again when we both knew more words so we could maybe introduce ourselves. Anyway, back then you and I loved the polar bears, baby.

It was the swimming. Crazy loud splash. I first saw you by the polar bears. You were sleeping and dreaming of icebergs and I tried telepathy but you didn't stir.

In the parking lot I sneezed and I think this woke you and your plastic panther blinked.

Apple Picking

1.

One Sunday Ama, Papá, Ruth, Rocio, Fausto, myself, my cousin Manuel, and his wife Elena were gathered

in the living room. A Bible salesman had on display an array of Bibles in front of us on the floor. There

were big Bibles, little Bibles, leather bound Bibles, children's Bibles. Bibles, Bibles, Bibles. Each of them with its own religious

experience stamped on the cover. The salesman spoke of virgins and the Passion. And then asked Manuel, "How did God make

your wife?" Manuel smirked and said, "From my rib." The salesman sermoned about the woman's role as his eyes watched my sisters

and me and the newly married Elena. I was eight but even then, those words he spoke didn't sound right to me.

2.

A number of years ago a study was conducted in Mexico, researchers asked men and women about their marital status. Men responded

Estoy casado. *Estoy* being a conditional state of being. Women responded *Soy casada.* *Soy* being a permanent condition.

3.

Mamá Andrea is eighty-seven years old. A devout Catholic. She walks with a hobble, a hunched back underneath layers

of clothes, a scapular around her neck that hangs snuggled between her breasts, wrinkled from feeding eight children. They sag down

to her belly button. One day she proclaims, "If I could I would chop these things off." In her hand a meat cleaver. "They are useless

and in the way." She had been bent over a featherless chicken attempting to dismember it.

4.

Juan: *Felipe que a tu esposa María el dejaron un terreno. Yo creo que pronto va tener mas que tu.*

Felipe: *Y de quien es María?*

(jajajajajaja)

5.

Here's the sex talk from my mother, "Laura, boys only want one thing, don't give it to them."

6.

On her wedding day, my mother wore a blue dress not white because she wasn't married the proper way. My mother *fue robaba* by my father. He stole her from her house, from her father's ownership. My father took her into his bed *y la hizo suya*, he made her his.

7.

John: Phillip, I hear your wife Mary inherited some land. Pretty soon, she's going to have more than you.

Phillip: And who does Mary belong to? (hahahahahaha)

8.

Outside on the stone stoop Papá, Ruth, and Papá Juan were gathered on a lovely summer day. Papá says to Ruth "If you ever get pregnant at this age don't think of coming back to this house." Papá Juan steps in and says, "Don't say that, Jesus. One day she just might get up and leave this house for good." Papá says, "*Pues, que Dios la bendiga.*" (Well, may God bless her)

9.

Our lady of Refuge, pray for us. Our lady of Angels, pray for us. Nuestra Señora de San Juan, pray for us. Our Lady of Altagracia, pray for us. Our Lady of Fatima, pray for us. The most pure; the most humble; the most faithful; the most devout; the most obedient; the most merciful, pray for us. And the all mighty Virgen de Guadalupe, *ruege por nosotros.*

10.

On our way back from Oaxaca, we had to stop in Mexico City.
Sarah's uncle suggested we go to the Basilica since our plane

didn't leave until the next day. I made my duty-bound pilgrimage
unintentionally. At the new Basilica with the souvenir shop

in the basement, I waited for mass to be over to go see you the only
blessed woman among all women. My dignity wanted to taste

your cherry sweet skin as it mixed with my own that burned
your throat like cheap whisky. You passed by so quickly as I stood

on the automated walkway. I barely got a glimpse of your face
looking down at me. I gazed at your image on the cloak

of Juan Diego, my breath pausing for a moment and I thought,
"If you ask me, it's you who ruined it for the rest of us. Not Eve."

Hot Like Hot Mustard

Or cooler than Cool
 Whip. Hard to say for sure,
 Shirley. Either way, our
 mouths go fizzy
 with champagne. A real
 tongue tickler. A slip like a slip
 of the tongue. What I like
 best about France is French
 kissing. You too? I know—
 a practical person wouldn't say
 such things. Good thing
 he ain't here. I've a secret. I'm dying
 to tell you. It's here beneath
 my shirt and tie. It's about
 the shape of a heart and
 twice as hard to get a hold of.

Honeymoon Snapshot

So here we are: my fuzzed-out sweater, Nantucket bucket hat, and you in your flyest gear: tortoise shell specs, life-size sea horse (Don't think I don't notice) earrings and a feasty blue fur number. "Oh, *fit*—

I mean *forget it*," you sigh, and flash: there we were, trekked in from Zymosaan ("Lebanese dip?" No. "Wonder drug?" Nope.) by way of Aah. Then a Zippo's flame, greasy fog outside the chip shop. September

in Glasgow wasn't April in Paris, but good enough for a bad movie: flash car, cash to spare, you so bonny, and me, and Clyde—Clyde being

"the river that chops this town in twain, which is good only for ending a damned poem," sighed Mac MacHare, the retired blind man who took us sightseeing.

Actuality of

A questionable boy,
not following the
music but following
the rain. & Though
the rain has its
own charisma he
won't call it music,
even though it is.

Flight of

Minstrel play-
Wright brothers have
come to an end.
Their tar makeup,
made up of
decomposed marrow,
smears the stage &
their handwritten
pages float down
to the debris.

In the Aspirin Orchard

O analgesia trees! How your powdery
fruit soothes. Ancient tasting tablets
chalky as fossils dissolve on our tongues,

tame our pains. Wearing relief's
crown of flowers, sex re-enters
the room, uninvited, shy—

disguised as religion, robed in blessed
caresses that address every last malady.
Reckoned rightly, all suffices.

Misgivings licked clean, I abandoned
my love under a budding aspirin tree.
He was singing the chorus

of Let's Pretend it's Snowing.
He had a sleeping disease,
and often nodded off while

I was talking. Our treasure's
buried in clay pots where I first
nursed tender aspirin saplings
into bloom. I haven't the heart
to dig it up. Years have passed.
Our orchard prospered and spread.

Now hired pickers fill linen
aprons with harvests of dusty pills.
Like crumbs of asteroid

or hailstones, clusters
of ripening aspirins hang,
tiny alluring lanterns,

blurrily aglow. The merest sight
of them palely burns aches away.
Darling, do I hear the whining

of distant violins?

Let us kneel, for the age
of fevers is upon us.

White Blindfold

When I play it all back in my head, I recall only the joys of those hopeful decades. How good the grub was back then! How gently we bandaged the horses' eyes in order to lead them to safety after our barn was torched by the authorities. When the Dairy Fair judges declared the mold that gives our cheese its unique bite a kissing cousin to penicillin, doctors began to prescribe our homemade Brie for a wide variety of common ailments, from rheumatism to whooping cough.

In those days it seemed our good luck would never run dry. Then after the parade, after Taffy won an almond torte at the cakewalk, she was crowned Miss Sour Cream. Oh proud and grateful hour! During her coronation a spotted calf poked its head out from under her skirts, a bottle-fed orphan bawling for its mother. Next day the air smelled like chicken potpie and for once, my pocket didn't get picked. The high school marching band practiced for eight or nine hours straight, so folks who met in the streets found themselves hugging to music, whether they knew each other or not, a practice eventually called "dancing," which still persists today.

Chinese New Year

1. The dragon falls at sundown, in a heap. Without water, the colors run.
2. The photograph of me is really a negative of what you saw on the back of my neck.
3. When we used to fuck, I'd say "what role shall I be tonight?" but what I meant to say was "I wish I were the moon goddess, sleeping the light."
4. Touch ages like butter turned sour.
5. The holes in this poem are from when you walked away.
6. I could never be a ballerina and bend my limbs into awkward girl
7. even for you.
8. The clowns dancing on your wall remind me of a fun house nightmare.
I am the purple one, blushing violet hard.
9. Your bed is an old book I lost and do not want to ask for it back, even though I own it.
10. You are the gap, the gap, the gaping bull, and the gap, and also, the gaping heart.
11. Until yesterday, I dreamt in color.
12. The jukebox of tunes is shattered, *baby dearest*.

Truth

Flipping quarters into a plastic cup on top of a dirty flat wooden table, my adolescence spread out before me like a new perfume, hinting of sour. They guzzled beer and so did I and the washing machine in the back of his house ran on like a freight train pushing cargo at night and everything else was a crass joke, as was my relationship with the boy to the right who went down on me in the bathroom three weeks earlier and forgot to breathe, but when I went to touch him, he shriveled like a prune and so we were left without conversation.

Later that evening, the big one carried me upstairs in one sweep as I vomited all over the carpeted steps and into the room that was black and smelled like fifteen-year-old boy and there I was asleep when he stripped me down and sprang on top of me, a jack rabbit without form or grace or permission, a thick fist in my mouth while I swallowed my screams. The spinning of the room and him crashing down on me like a building on an ant, breaking my back apart at the seams. For the second time that night, I was left without something, my body floating down the hallway like some unknown ghost, bumping skinny knees on the corners of strange rooms.

Ars Amandi

(I closed my jaw by hand
and I stuck the tip of my tongue one at a time
in all of the holes in my molars

then you stretched out your hand and started
to jumble my hair—and then
everything around was covered by dandruff)

—*Translated by Gene Tanta*

Men with Mustaches

History has a few words for you
if you would be so kind
as to step outside for a moment.

History's boyfriend
used to wear a handlebar mustache
but then he joined the police force.
He's shaved it off since.

Father figures come and go
like spring chickens in the yard
but soap in your eye stings.

Stalin had a bigger mustache than Hitler,
this much we know for sure:
his bald barber must have had
to trim it every morning with utmost study.

They both sang while they bathed, opera mainly.
Not together, not enough room in the tub.
Stalin was the worse of the two crooners,
completely tone-deaf, but who could tell him?

Hitler had a falsetto to shatter crystal.
His bald barber had a mustache too.

Imprimatur

The main body of my work, he says
with his hands in his pockets, *deals with*
very brittle matter, namely, glass. On his grid,
a wisteria divided into nine hundred and sixty-six
precisions plus base, hemisphere broken on a fault

where the curvature splits on the page. The lamps
are made for sale, mostly—this one, a request
by a woman who already owns a couple
in the irregular lower border group,
sees bedside space for a third.

Louis fancies the idea of replacing
the shade's open peak with some more
work, a crown that connects more clearly
the panels to their weighty base, furthering
the effect. He erases the straight edge and tries

a network of pendant branches. *Won't convince*
all subjects, he notes, bent over the science:
sometimes horticulture's *a pain in the ass*.
Though the wisteria clicks, he frowns.
Where the lightbulb would disclose,

invention conceals. How tight
will Edison's lips seal at the sight?
Can he be persuaded by "the dependence
of translucence upon its radical," etc.? Will
juries term this turn—"irregular upper *and*

lower border group?" The fuss. Louis massages
the dips in his temples and refocuses his eyes
above the bevy of flickers. Painting wasn't
sharp enough, photography had no room
for signatures, ceramics never offered

the remote comfort of the lamps'
copper strips, soldered and sentimental,
lustrous. Outside, the night deepens behind
the trees, the fields' edges dimming to vibrations.
Impossible to separate hues from the determining light,

every surface a sort of scone as the globe slips behind
its dark drop. *Am I sexy enough to propound
these superlatives?* He switches off the light,
leans back in the slats of his chair,
and squints out at the lines.

Fixed

The tip of your spine is a tender rage
sighing
curved ache and idle
Colored glass fire pink poured out for you

A shaft of sewn smoke bitter trembles
You say I haven't found it
but there's no place else to dig
The lady slipper the sand the shine are fading

out swam fish opal blades on orchid tides
The spawn of the leave
leave leave again and come back
the panic the spaces hold nothing but air
the panic the touch the panic

Psychic

He tells me I have an addiction

It will surface this year. An issue I struggle with,
Huh. At home I ask my cards if he is telling the truth.

(Quick draw) Six of cups, ok, ten of cups, then, well.

What do cups have to do with addiction? So I

Look at my palm, there are so many lines

I can't read them all. Instead, press on the soft fleshy mounds: that's a sure
sign that I'm an addict.

Addict to what, though...

Which addiction is Angel referring to?

Is he picking up on my past life as a smoker, could it be the candy that
replaced *that* habit? Could it be drinking a glass of red wine at night? Admit
IT! Ok, sometimes two! Could it be playing the lottery every Saturday and
Wednesday? Using numbers from the totals of grocery receipts? That I cross
my fingers every time it turns 11:11, or maybe the pennies I stop to pick up
and put in the lucky jar with the special sparkly money dust.

What addiction is he talking about? Oh, I wish I'd kept Angel's card, or
even remembered what he looked like, I just heard the word (~~addict~~), I
floated elsewhere, clenching my teeth because I had nothing else left,
Oh Angel!

I am a rooster, a Taurus, my number is five.

Fantasia on the Machine

When on, the machine is red inside
and rhythmic. Of, the machine
would be a whitish gray: color
its blood. An odd machine, a litanic
ritual machine, like a Catholic
church. A comparative thing
like clouds striving to imitate
taking the shape of clouds;
a yearning, too, like a stalag-
mite or the down-turned tendrils
of banyans. It has its problems:
deteriorating right hip, misfortunes
of the guts, the usual ills of this
world. It bounds upward most days:
own-winds billowing a self-sail,
the green aplitude of things enough
to make the pie tart. And so it works
well, although the machinations
are at times quite mundane. So be it.
The warmth of inside suffices, but some
times it leaves house, often with gusto.
First the ritual, of course. Hat and coat,
check. If raining: umbrella, check; then
practical pocket: keys, lip balm;
check. Totemic pocket: hair clip,
red marble from the Dawn Treader;
check.

The Architectural Tour on the Misspelled River

Balustrade! This chaconne speaks
to the architectural features it loves
the most. Come to the exhibition, here
on the river: this river moves fast, is named
Catastrophe after the woman of the same
name. Buttress! She would lower herself
to speak on this river if only she could get
paid for it. We all want to get paid—bay!
Bays, bays, bays. We're all leaning to
separate ourselves from this swift-moving
dammed thing. And on the dam, we've
an ogee arch—no, it's just a bracket.

What to Wear, Alice?

Coronation day, and I've nothing to wear.

Manuel and Manuelito go out and buy us boutonnieres, but

I can't stand this preparation! The smell of unfinished

Bees, like a honeycomb coated in sawdust.

Lately, I've been wearing no makeup, not going nowhere lit-up and strobing

Like a Friday deserves, not reeking of hot, hot mustard. But:

"That's what he was doing, right? Trying to simplify? Get shorter?

Alice Notley?"

I don't think this chemical cleans like they say on TV.

And just—Alice Notley!

When I Was a Sex Goddess

Every cell burned, sacred as a waxing flame,
every turn of the head cut cool suitors
into splint size, swooning in myrrh, their shame

inaudible as ice cubes in blown glass or
laughter in the distance you recognize
suddenly as your own, without rancor.

For instance, one suitor arranged me nicely,
starfish-like, on the school-gray couch she'd
dragged from Salvation across the precipice

of Morningside to the conflagration (she'd
wisely doused the works in retardant)
of West '19th Street down into the wee

anonymity of her underground pent
where she expected me to Hold Still. Quite
unabruptly, this comic arrangement

burst like a body-sized seed pod—you might
say All Hell Broke Loose—and I emerged cross
as a diva, glossed as a holy night,

a shrewd and primping Iambe and gorgeous
as an amalgam of goat, lion,
and serpent. (You might say I changed.) Bossy

as Brillo, I thought about trying on
a human costume and whose story
this would weed from my life, which scions

of worship this would ease out of my aura
and which brave simpatico would break
from the gate and woo me into glory.

Traveling by Hand*

i

There was once a word that rhymed with beer, it slid around the floor of the barroom-slish-slosh. I said: You are the one I coagulate with, the joke I'm still not laughing over, a swarm of ghostlies, a great big piece of cake. It was all I could do to keep my hair from flying away.

I drove a brand-new VW Bug that cost \$1900 in the year 1969, layered friends in the back seat like filo dough, dropped them off drunk at dorms one at a time, peered at the road until the white line showed itself and led me home. I was sodden with sloe gin, illicit in love, ripe for lessons of flight and medication.

ii

I have never seen such strange salutations of commandeered survival, a terrible code, a persistent binary, the way the body rumbas past midnight, the women I danced with and never saw again. There are others alone in this room pretending to send messages through ESP.

Like:

1. Soon I will be in love again, I will fall like a stone from the mountain.
2. Someone is about to freeze me so I zipped my legs shut.
3. You are so much sweeter than TV, crazy thing.

iii

Non-mania lasts a long time, huge as a haberdashery. Why can't it go along evenly for a while, a straight line, a hoot? There was a woman lying behind me who thought she belonged there. Before too long she died, just like that.

Perhaps I should make postcards, I thought, for presents or small books or a room full of postcard books. Books dying of salt or salt in blocks or blocks of books or blocks of copper turquoise aquamarine. Blistered books stacks logs tied books turquoise toxic books the copper the mottled metal. Books under siege books behaving like entropy books disintegrating books swelling all these ontological books.

iv

Who knows what ontology means? Does it mean

Women floating in a river of salt?

Women soaking in a river of books?

A river of dissolving books?

A library of river-soaked crystallized books?

Does it mean

Women on their bellies in the stream of books?

Metal wrapped around women?

Three dead books among hundreds of dead books?

Books made of salt?

I will not say Lot's wife, but here she is on her belly in the river.

Her hair has turned to books.

v

The only way out of this damned Moulin Rouge is with a compass. Pick two pills and put them in a hat. Pull them out and chew them up and don't vomit because if they stay down you will be blessed by the gods, need I say more, of din and deliverance.

South wall: Birds in the fireplace.

West wall: Curtains calling me to be naked.

North wall: Plastered: the bones of a mother.

East wall: The city punctured with insouciance.

vi

Your face is in mine the way priests' vestments bring out the who do the who done the who are you. When Paul Newman kissed Joanne Woodward I felt my arms around her, the muscles in her back tightened then melted, her mouth approached like an open pear, her head full of stories about me, how she'd wanted me from birth and now it was up to me to touch her, and suddenly, without warning or imprimatur, I knew exactly what to do.

I thought:

George and Gregg grew gastronomical and garrulous and gunned their Geo toward G&G Gourmet, galvanized by the grease and glycerin in the god-awful grinders. Gee, said Gregg, garnished with two g's, a glossolalia-great gobs of giblets, George, your guts are gorgeous with globules! George graciously gossiped: Gone are the gaudy gazettes of gumption and gooseberry. Gallop, Gregg, for it is global and ghostly to grab grinders given your gumball gist and gizzard.

vii

Then I was Oscar Wilde. I glued him to my diary with a daisy, just a random page, a random thought beckoning me toward men in wigs.

I slept in coach with my feet up, head poking into the aisle, and suddenly there was a boy/man across from me with a pillowcase of belongings and he said I looked exactly like the lead singer of the Pretenders. It was the kind of dark only Nebraska knows, no

phosphorescence no inchworm glow no firefly dust in the palm of your hand. It was three in the morning and he liked me, my hair on my face like Chrissie Hynde's, my nose, the whole works, Chrissie. Can you sing? he said and Nebraska sucked me under. I slept inside her round wheaty globe, snoring by the time he called me bitch and skulked away.

It was the year of my last dark beer, a slice of skin peeled from one spot and grafted on another, a time to fly away steadily, with great panic, toward peace.

viii

In my secret life I was stressed over chickadees, their pointed dee dee dees. There was suet on the ground where we lay like stunned squirrels, a selection of wartime stories playing on the loudspeakers that hung on the eaves of the bird house. Beside me: my love with her shiny plumage.

There was a river with rocks and voices, a woman watching swallows, two wings and hands quiet in her lap, the river over stones and her hair and her face.

She felt it for the first time as a kind of innocence. It was a small berry of possibility, years before she bit into it.

Jackson Browne, she said, sounds the same in every song. And she brought a stack of LPs into my husband's house where my husband had played Johnny Cash so loud he pitied himself into a thirty-three and a third vinyl state, hard like Johnny's whiskey voice, frozen like Jackson Browne in 1969. The young woman (I was not old myself) said Listen how everything sounds the same, piano, voice, violin. We sat beneath the beech whose leaves moved like a wind chime—it was 1979—we'd both been sober three years. I said Kiss me, Jackson.

**Note: Much of the raw material for this piece was composed in the presence and sometimes with the assistance of the student poets of Columbia College Chicago, 1992-2002. For this, and more, I owe them thanks.*

11/2

from *Printable Forecast*

Rain / Thunder

Showers

Showers

AM Clouds / PM Sun

Partly Cloudy

Partly Cloudy

Partly Cloudy

Showers

Showers

Showers

Shell that sears the petal glare

Boom or loom says the wave, or a day

My little electric boat, switch and gloaming

Blister a twist the sky-fire slanting

It keeps a flame splinter in the pupil, a view

Appearance is mute and tuneless

Name louder than water

Resonance of too far

In your creased dream the phosphor number, coquillage

Bluebell shrill in the meadow

The moving beauty blights

(brown day)

11/8

Scattered T-Storms
 PM T-Storms
 AM Clouds / PM Sun
 Partly Cloudy
 Mostly Sunny
 Partly Cloudy
 Rain / Snow Showers
 Scattered Showers
 Showers
 Light Rain

More than not not going
 they way they meant or meant, collective season
 leaf-black in hand new meant
 world a welt its own or frame
 they mean no such moment
 my sunk pomegranate
 my feet in rust dirt you
 surfeit you welt you keep
 comparing this to right green

Rain rim malignant moment
 slopes where the birds slit
 sky for something lasting later, erase

We we on the day's my
 what's felt collects its endings
 arcs elate the space
 which clamors and craves

Zone of its emanation
spun span of the leaf's hand
tree-struck god
eats color from our eyes
weave your arms gray watcher
eat code where it grows in the flower's skin, collision

Wealth kills the aim
the aureole array it
in mute, in migrant
when armless others
exhaust the stain

Don't err or arm
march of subjects
claim

Spin

This is life on a cooling planet,

I guess,

Marguerite says. Help me,

I'm shaking.

She sings of star-crossed lovers

horizontally stacked in the past, herself

being one of a set. Help me,

it hurts. She says it is burning

but pleasant.

The crowd cries back:

This is life on a cooling planet,

I guess. If it has no soul

then it has no soul.

Notes

for D.W.

a tiny sex narrative, buried

costly to bury

her veils

or impediments

what

has been done with the child while we tended the party

has become

rice grains

rice wine

in baby cups

comely arrangements

tangentially

mother

father

baby-cat, baby-dog, baby-mouse

one was found

at her desk this weekend, dead

A Song of the South

Critter control setting out traps for a cobra on the loose.

Oh Moody Alabama, beer-sodden and rowdy.

No serum kits on hand.

A symphony in the sewers where crickets are used as bait.

Never mind your MP3 and all that chat-room angst.

The lynch mob's at our doors.

Oh the promise.

Of release in the momentary swing of a summer fling—

Cops and Robbers

Entering high school I never
tired of playing with action figures—
Wolverine, Venom, Cobra
Commander and Darth Vader's

plastic limbs banging together,
chipping the paint off one another
as it falls to the soft earth of a mattress
—and I was always up

for a game of cops and robbers,
even if I was one of the oldest kids
playing. I was usually a captain,
picking kids lined up against the side

of my house like a row of criminals
shooting me a hopeful glance
to join a team of crooks, a clique
of young hooligans in training.

The cops had to count to fifty
while we robbers ran through
the neighborhood, spreading out
like frantic rats. Sometimes

we would pair up—the smallest kid
by my side as we ran through dark
alleys and gangways that led to a yard
unattended by vicious dogs, looking

for the perfect hiding spot—*behind
the garbage can maybe, under the porch
possibly, inside some stranger's hallway
definitely, we'll stay put in the shadows.*

We would come out of hiding in the name
of freedom, brushing close to buildings
and bushes, sneaking our way to the steps
of my front porch that acted as a jail

cell where the somber faces of the captured
pressed between the banister bars,
waiting for the break out that came
with a slap of our hands, a tag
of liberation that cost us captivity
by the guard on duty who couldn't
tag us all, just the fresh meat.
Then we would sit patiently,
crying out for help when it was near,
our arms outstretched, hoping to be tagged
out, wanting that freedom just so
the chase could begin all over again.

Prelude, no Fugue

It's what pissoires, sleeping hippopotamuses, dead men, and pea pods know.
Not the body's nudity but the organ of the skin's control, buds on a tongue,
fingernail scraping a gnat's wing from eyewhite, a cold fish jumping from
a cold brook. Words we know we forget to use. Devils are made of dust.
Some doctors chain smoke and take quinine with their afternoon tea. This
city might be a Chicagoland of overpasses that leads to one of two places:
billboard row with no-one-anyone-knows faces painted on them or railroad
tracks. Never know when your main street in Buffalo coffee shop window
(under the Genesee hotel) will fill itself up with a sideways flying most
beautiful woman of a suicide. Eight stories and didn't lose her shoes
until the street said so. As an endorsement of the everyday, coffee does little
to reveal the finer points of blue jay feathers left behind, mayapples bubbling
with maggots, phone calls a lover makes when well out of the room, times
when it isn't even known that a small walk to a corner store was made
with a built-up shoe, the kind a Frankenstein would unknowingly sport
had he, unlike you or you or yours, had really truly in this zoo of a world,
lived.

The Fretwork of Bone

At dinner after the conference, she says, no, she doesn't like her job, she liked working at the auto plant better. Though at first she put the window units in backwards. Midsize cars. Maybe some businessman, accelerating later through a mountain curve, sudden rain-scud, pressed the button, and got windows a-tremble in st. vitus dance, an open-close uncontrollable grimace. After that, it was food prep at the cannery, and now home health. Like any job it's got its pros and cons. Like management trying to fire her. The anti-war work, they can't stand it. But the flexibility is good. She doesn't talk like Nadia about the satisfaction, the going into an old person's apartment where the windows are nailed shut, nothing but two eggs and a bottle of sherry in the fridge, the sitting down by her and saying, *What do you need? What can I get for you?* No, she says, she doesn't like the job at all, but she gets to do exactly what they want to fire her for, phone calls, press releases, end death for corporate profit, end utility shutoffs. End the fires. In small closed rooms the kerosene fumes and blazes, eats up the air, furniture, a fuse of hair. She does what she needs to do, daytime, and writes up the work reports late at night. No, she's not worried about losing the job, you can't worry about things like that, there's too much to do. We are passing food up and down the table, twenty of us, szechuan bean curd, and steamed salmon with ginger. She says, *This fish gave its life for us, at the very least we should eat every bit*, forking over the fretwork of bone, and opening her mouth to taste the last shred of tattered flesh.

Breakfast Again: The Interpenetration of Opposites

Breakfast is a dark-glazed sun on a white paper napkin, or the dark side of the moon, moon-cake emblazoned with a sign, twinned glyphs, perhaps happiness, health, luck doubled. Two people support each other, pillars, clasped hands, an archway over an unknown future. Or push each other back, arm's length, locked opposites. Two children sit down beside me, and the table tilts my hot milky tea. The older unfolds the crisp bakery paper for the younger. Outside, their father smokes a cigarette in the doorway. They watch him through the plate glass window, they stare at him as their hands lift the food. After breakfast I walk two blocks to the courthouse. Inside people sit on the floor, backs to the wall, heads down on knees, waiting. The hall smells like pee, piss from the men's toilet. I stand in a knot of others here to get sentenced, back after a night and day in jail. We missed breakfast then, 4 a.m. boxed cornflakes, milk. We had lunch at 10 a.m., white bread, baloney, a packet of mayonnaise, a pint of white milk. The signs said: *Notify attendant if you are sick*. The policewoman said: *Form a line, back to the wall*. Said: *If you feel sick, tell us*. Said: *Listen to what I say*. We listened to five minutes of this. Then one of us said: *If you'd talked that much to Mr. Diallo before you drew your gun, he would be alive today*. At supper we asked for fruit, were told there was none. Then a prisoner trustee brought in a cardboard box of oranges and said, *You have to speak up for yourself in here*. Tossing the bright fruit into our hands, he stepped out into the hall, and pushed the cell door shut. Parallel bars, our iron gate to freedom, the xylophone of fate. For some, the future welded over with a metal grate.

Wormwood

Please don't drink the absinthe. You went mad
last time and tried to kill a beggar. Anisette is enough.

Worms in the omelette slide dry down my throat,
eggs having been overcooked. Protein lives.

I shave with a rusty straight blade, curving
up and out from my neck and chin, unafraid.

I walk quietly through crystalline air, steal
from the house, and chop wood in the back yard.

In dark hours you listen, worried that I might
be writing my suicide note. Our grocery list is long.

Your eyes squirm beneath their lids and I listen
to your Russian monologue, watch your Cyrillic tongue.

Your anemic hand writes letters that will remain
dormant. The gulag refuses to serve sangria.

Stop Pretending

In this jungle the yo-yo is king.

We are strung from the ground to the Almighty Hand.

Say: no face, no legs, no chest, no lips.

Just almighty hand smooth from underwork and overthought.

The trees are a notepad. Scratch and scatter of electric-tailed
squirrels playing ring around the tree-trunk.

Admit it admit it you said. Admit you like things tender.

O.K. I like tender like an outstretched paperclip
threatening the thin temple of my head.

Stop pretending time is not a bootstomp to the groin.

Stop pretending you are more than toeworm and toothgristle.

you know before you begin that you are already finished

this english casts a cantonese shadow
a shudder that won't rest still on the page

i desire the precision of radicals but my mouth spills latin ache
sour broken haw flakes melt on my tongue

the way you never melt
your limbs tense with etymologies we do not share, future
lovers whose names we will not speak

as our dictionary shuts with a decisive slam
the brief cheer of your gerberas tremble then
quickly recover as though that book had never opened

Vincent Goes To Paris

so this garbage man discovered your
fingerprint paint stains on the handle
of a broken briefcase in an alley near
Paris. a postcard lay crumpled inside.
all words long ago erased or scratched
away, except for '...and more around
the world it comes... from beaches,
from coffee, from orange juice and water.'
some pieces of chalk were cracked on the
ground; these the garbageman collected
then slipped into the case before he sold it
on the martyr's block—where our new world
army told him to take it. they said, "donate
your winnings and we'll make you famous
for a day."

J. Jablonski

maybe she called back while i was listening
to my favourite song. perhaps that was just a
daydream. i hadn't slept in days and dreaming
was all i could do, so the conversation never left
my brain. then the phone rang after i fell asleep.
she left a message asking if i'd found the drug
she was looking for. but she was still in 1983, and i
was in august. so if we ever meet again, it'll be
in a different coffee shop, smoking different
brands of cigarettes, and we'll have little
to say about nothing.

HWY

The road, alias truck driving
 through America chasing Kerouac's ghosts
 hauling a load of rotting beef, grind

shimmy and shake with each passing sign and post
 passing another Waffle House, HoJo, and rest stop.
 2:00 A.M. pit break, well look how nice, a glory hole

the number and disclaimer read, "we never close, especially for cops."
 Now that's service. Gotta carry on to the puppet factory, wonder
 how long the night will last, gotta cope

throw back some low-grade speed, grounder
 fast and listen to the highway
 it sounds like a deja vu, but I try not to remember her

cause the moment you recognize that via
 conscious memory kicks in, live before it, for
 when it kicks, it instantly disappears, that path

is only contained contained in the tainted waking memory
 in the surroundings of your childhood bedroom, Johnny Carson
 on TV and that moment when you were a little wanderer.

I'll pick up this hitchhiker by the road sign
 hopefully he's not another pissed off VietnamVet. who got fired from his
 bus-driving gig
 poor bastard almost killed me, fortunately for shock treatment

conversation that brought him back, figures
 well here's to government medication Pop. Oh shit
 this guy looks like my old man. He opens the door like a trigger.

"Bout fuckin' time, I've been out here for hours, it
 feels like days, maybe years I've been waitin' for you.
 John Marshall Knox, pleased to finally meet you, fits

just right, nice handshake son call me Jack. Cool
 rig, this'll do just fine...how long you been on the road?"
 "Couldn't say for sure, when the weather's right I try to pull

on as much as I can. I keep going till I find
bad weather or traffic." Miles Davis' *Sketches
of Spain* mingle with the taste of the sunshine

soaked dusk of the desert air that rises
in bloom with the night and the rig is lighter.

"What are you haulin' son? Huh? You got cows square dancin'

back there or what? Damn... that's aah, that's a lot... could that be noisier?"

"Funny you should say it like that, you hungry?"

"No I had a bite with a friend earlier."

"How long you been drivin' a truck there younger?"

"Well just a few months, I'm on my first tour."

"Yeah... you're no truck driver

yet. I can tell these things."

"What do you mean? You some kind of vagabond saint or something?"

"No, no... nothing that glamorous... just a wanderer."

Souvenir

She dreams of ruined places,
bleached stone lining the landscape
like teeth, a thousand famines
bought and sold.

le table, les chaises, les fleurs

They read poems
among the grit of sheets,
cracks on the ceiling
lengthening in the sun.
His fingers trace her thigh,
circle her wrist, this strange
currency of sighs.

la fenetre, la porte, les escaliers

It's trick of distance penciled
across eyelids. By now,
he's farther away, in Provence
or Marseilles, inviolate,
nestled among women,
their tongues rolling over words
like sun-drenched hills.

la femme, l'adoratrice, la maitresse

Her French is bad, she knows,
an arson of *je m'appelle*
and *comment*, her mind a flurry
of schoolgirls, all knee socks
and jumpers, handing her verbs
hand over hand.

pleurez, lavez, respirez

Last night, along the river,
he pushed her rough against
the quay, pressed a palm
against her breast, a hundred nouns
catching and dragging
in her throat.

le faim, la rue, la nuit

document, erasures: aeiou, sometimes y words

all night I plotted my revenge on him
for leaving the door open and letting the light in
we are veterans of the late night fight
the bourbon bottle, spoiled dinner, both of us uptight

night I plotted my revenge on him
for the door open letting the light in
we of the night fight
the bourbon bottle, spoiled dinner, both of us uptight

night i my on him
for door light in
of night fight
bourbon, both of us uptight

my on
for door
of
bourbon, both of us

my
us

my

document, 11-8-03: Kingsley, Michigan

The small areas of standing water have frozen on top of the glass
the first coat of snow the snow that lines the road shoulder edge and
crusts the hills
of dirt ruts the snow in the rifts it is snowing into the eartips of the deer
the deer that are placing their hooves in crusted ruts.

Two Dreams of Deluge

1.

Wake up thrashing. This time
hail fell thinly, needled our shoulders
first sweet then harsh, flash-turning
to water. I stand with you on a mountain road,
showing you the green country I could have
called my home. The next moment water
rises rapid around us like shame. Small white
churches, the only bright left on the hills,
now look shabby. I can see the flood filling them.
All the countryside will be sunk
into the Aegean. I search
the landscape for any stones to stand on.

2.

The next night it was my father
on the phone, telling me casually he's having a party
during the time I'm to visit. My aunt will bring
her Turkish lover. My uncle doesn't know. Your own
brother, I say. The devastation uncoils in me, old thorn
in my throat. Thick spongy knot. I'm only half
sleeping by now. My whole body motionless
but in the dream I pace my bedroom, slurring floods
into the phone. How could you.

Hermit age

I walk outside and the pigeon woman
 is still there
 at the corner.
 "Be gone foul pigeon
 woman," I want to yell.
 But she is far
 too beautiful
 and too old, and too much
 like the birds she feeds. I go home.
 I go to bed. I get up
 the next day
 and she is there again.
 "Beautiful birds," she says
 in Polish and smiles, and I
 smile because I don't speak
 Polish,
 but all the old neighborhood ladies
 with blue
 shawls on their heads think I do. "Beautiful
 birds," I say and smile, but she knows
 that's not the truth. I go
 home. I watch Polvision. I go to bed. I get up,
 early for me. I walk outside
 with bread.
 She is not there. It is Sunday, and as I learned
 in Krakow, that's a very important day.
 I go to the corner, but the pigeons
 are hiding. The pigeons are
 hiding, the street is empty,
 the Polish
 bakery is closed. I throw.

Turkey on Saturday

Turkey dinner with my family on a Saturday afternoon
is unlike Thanksgiving but somehow better than midday Sunday pasta,
like graduating from kindergarten one day,
then standing in a college auditorium
on another, moving your tassel across your mortarboard.
My brother and sister-in-law were visiting mom and dad
with my two-month-old nephew. I hadn't seen the kid
in three weeks, so I showed up to see how big he was getting,
like an investigator seeking evidence at a taped-off crime scene.
My mother shows me online photographs,
claiming he looks like her as an infant. I look like my mother,
but the baby definitely resembles my brother, like reel-to-reel
home movie footage, pre-VHS, when he began walking,
wearing a mustard-colored turtleneck and plaid bellbottoms.
Children weren't spared the fashion of the seventies,
when it was simpler before the age of information—
9/11, terrorists. The Twin Towers collapse in my head.
I decide that the baby has my sister-in-law's lips—
too full, unlike anyone on this side of the family.
Stuffed with turkey and mashed potatoes,
I play with my not-asleep nephew, while he stares at my face,
lying in his rocker-seat and grabbing my fingers,
like my father clenching a drumstick at the head of the table.
The baby doesn't know what to do with them and releases.
He smiles when I say his name like audio recordings in slow motion,
between instances of blowing air from my closed lips, causing them
to shake like "brrr" sounds made while standing in snow,
like frozen moments on winter mornings.
My brother videotapes this, and I picture an older cousin
at the age of ten, lifting me in the air when I was an infant
on some mid-70s Christmas day. I'm screaming in delight
but I hear nothing; 8-millimeter films were silent.
I recall childhood fears of Russia nuking the U.S.

when the arms race was at its height in the 80s.

My nephew was born on Christmas, 2002, and the rebuilding of Ground Zero is scheduled to begin. Thank God for turkey dinners on Saturday afternoons and new family members to care for, like evidence in sandwich bags—proof that something happened here.

V

Cuneiform. Rodchenko's red wedge. Museums point which way history's current arrowed. Television says that's all over. Israel and whoever, China and whoever, a few neighborhood squabbles mill and eddy. Everywhere else: rate increases with each renewal notice. Jaroslav Seifert said that in the end you love only your pipe. Mallarmé's? Ash. Seifert's? Cold. About time: your breath still bolts when you think how talking to a friend or sitting near a stranger was giving you cancer.

Ninja Movie

This one went too far—hurry up,
the leading fish is sick. Splayed out.
Generic sushi sucked down by green
Bolsheviks. Hideki, watch your back
the train is collapsing.
Talk to the broken glass.
Talk back to the son of a grasshopper
and beetlebug. She's shot
through with the flung pens.
Bug, what gorgeous crunchy
legs she collects into her drain den.
Hideki, the sawhorse lights
a flanking anklet to the tight road.
Hideki, your black pajamas
ended up on the valley floor.
Your thighs on the precipice.
Too far, too far Hideki.
Bug sucks the chilled marrow
from your third left toe.
Our man visited the dentist earlier
bought the best from the neighborhood
grocer, saw his radio off to the city
dumpster. Silly chitter chatter.
This one where the ninja doesn't return.
This one where the cherry tree's
crowned with smiling countenances
of all the gone 'tagonists.

El Lobo

Something is wrong here. Today there's enough light
and a blue sky, but I still feel stifled.
Here I am locked in a dialogue with the departed. One dead.
Hey Bobbie Bob, maybe if I pour
champagne on the small patch of land
in front of your building, it'll say something to you.
Yes, it was love, wasn't it. O I'm so angry
at your defection. Have another one
and the doorman, finding you dead in bed
will immediately know again. Please don't say how.

And you, most recent seeker of a place to crash and burn,
not in my backyard. O I believe in death.
Death exists and it's not a lover.
You write so well, translate the song of birds.
Have a Pouilly Fume (1980).
You're not a drunk if it's vintage.
Find a nymphlet to suck your nib (you will),
numb to the actual consequences.

Let's examine the interplay
between self-destructiveness and art,
the tango one does with El Lobo,
seduced by the sound, admiring his eyes.
What big eyes you have, El Lobo.
How metrical are your feet.

If to you it's an interesting story idea, then
here's a query, darling.
Consider a lettuce-crisp little article
on the aesthetics of self-destruction.
Address it to Baudelaire
now sawdust on the Back Fence floor.

The History of Midnight

My little, my little he'd have sifted through the trees
Gemmaed-up and rabbit soft fielding
A docile rummaging even gravity speeds
Winning over forms, including *The History of Midnight*
Including, *Before Your Time*
The knobs and spurs to prod arrangements
He rotates and plans
My little little ghost smoking
Who raised up occasions
Then waited in the buttery cold

My Movie

It was a day like any other,
with weather and traffic doing its usual stuff.
The record player was broken
and I'd turned to substances
to clear my mind. The young girl
had interrupted me in her school clothes, pouting about
some lost uncle overseas
and inheritances and I could tell
by her kneecaps that she was being sincere
in a good-looking way. I said
there are some days I tell children stories about
back in Africa
the girls that take off their toenails
when they marry god and the lost tribes
with feet shaped like ostriches'
and the tribesmen who eat the brains
of fallen warriors. I talk until my mouth
fills up with brains
and I become smart. Nobody looks at me.
Every Christmas I put out
water for the reindeer.
Nobody believes in reindeer, either: the
children say, "Elk. They're called Elk. And give
them a salt lick at least."
Kids grow fast. Just
yesterday this one was curled up
inside my sister
and now it's asking me if my grammar
is really correct. You want a story or not? Hallelujah.
How long before Santa comes
down the chimney
of the particle accelerator with a bag
full of animal cookies? Not long enough.
This film is going nowhere. Inaction
on the part of the universe
is likely to blame.

However.

I've never been to Africa I said
to the young girl that had entered
my office and besides,
that sign out there says *Private Detective* does it not?
You are just a child and these
stories inevitably require yes great adventures
yes perhaps to Africa but
also romantic things, lovemaking, fornication,
and so on and the law frowns
upon that does it not? Are you Catholic?
That would be worse. Take your
business to the travel agent down the hall.
I am a busy man.

There was dust on the blinds. She
turned her tearful face away
and burst out through the door, skirt
swishing, and plowed headfirst into
the postman, who despises me. I took out my
pocketwatch, walked in my
leather-soled shoes and
carefully closed the door before returning
to my magazines and opium.

Beautiful in the Oven

Then God spoke
to say only good
things about Christmas.

It was the day, after all, that he
pulled Jesus from the udder of the
mother-lady, put him
in the oven and baked us all gingerbread.

Take and eat, take and eat,
when they are ready, but please now,
watch your fingers!
The baby is still hot!

Then God spoke
to say only good things about
beautiful women.

It is known, after all, that he
is preferential of all things white and
rubbery, he made the moon,
you know, the moon, lilies,
and beautiful ladies.

He looked at me and I heard him whisper, a shame,
a shame.

If I put her in the oven, will she sweat?

She wanted sex.

He was too ill

and tired

So she bit him and bit him. Later, he died

about a week ago

about a week ago,

Arthur Pratt came home sick and frail

from the hospital

his wife greeted him at the door.

“When he got home, his wife ‘wanted
some,’”;

“He couldn’t help her out.”

“She went into a rage

started tearing into his flesh with her teeth

pulling out huge chunks.

We have a tape of him

and he suffered so much,

my Gwen, and he’s beautiful”

said his mother

finally living as a female

Eddie Araujo was finally living

as the female he always knew himself
to be.

three years ago

police say

police say

police say

police say that may have cost him his life.

as a young woman,

growing long hair

as a young woman

"We have a tape of him

"We have a tape of him

screaming

while she bites him."

When the police arrived

bloodied and shivering

Kelli Pratt tried to bite officers

The police made a videotape of her
afterward,

she refused to wash up,

so she looks like a vampire

with blood all over her face

She still had other things

in her teeth

flesh in her teeth, chunks of it

growing long hair
and wearing crop-tops

at a party

dreaming of Hollywood

He dreamed of becoming a Hollywood
make-up artist.

the 17-year-old beaten and strangled

at a party

and dumped his body

in a shallow grave

it was the first time he had worn a skirt out

she was afraid

in a peasant blouse and miniskirt

clad in women's clothing

wrapped in a blanket

hands and feet tied up,

his mother worried he still looked too
manly

while the police filmed the confession,
with more than 20 bites
with more than 20 deep tissue bites
bloodied and shivering
bloodied and shivering.
His death
his death was a direct result of
more than 20 bites for
not giving it up
chunks of flesh between teeth
blood all over
homicide charges

a number of people could have stepped in,
prevented or reported

this

none of them stepped in or reported this

His tombstone

dressing like a woman

His mother said

looking too manly, my

Gwen, he's

and he's

and he's

and he's

and he's beautiful, my baby. He suffered
so much. His tombstone
will say 'Gwen.'"

**All text in this piece remixed from news accounts of the murders of Gwen/Eddie Araujo and Arthur Pratt, from coverage in sfgate.com and the San Francisco Chronicle, October 18-19, 2002. Gwen Araujo was apparently beaten to death by three men for being transgendered, while Arthur Pratt was bitten to death by his wife for not having sex with her on demand.*

Everything She Asks of Me

So, I'm dating Marilyn Monroe. We're living together, actually. Right now, she's sitting on the white couch with the black stains, watching me write this. *What are you writing?* she wants to know. *A love letter*, I say.

She's eating grapes. She's really into them right now. One by one, she sucks them into her mouth with a little pop, crushes them between the whitest of teeth with the gentlest of violence. *What's the opposite of fruit?* she wants to know.

I don't know, I say. *Meat?* She purses her lips, considering. *No*, she says. *I don't think there is an opposite of fruit.*

We are both girls, which is true, but it's like saying that a nectarine and a watermelon are both fruit. She's a little tart rolling over the tongue, creamy; I crumble in the mouth, wet and rough.

She skips over to the bed, almost invisible with her cream skin on cream satin, hair the color of headlights at night. *Do these sheets make me look fat?* she asks. She's serious. *How do you know if you're beautiful? Are you only beautiful if someone else thinks you are? And what does it cost?* She almost only ever speaks in questions.

Last week, she was obsessed with cantaloupe and Eartha Kitt. As I got ready for work, she jumped up and down on the bed, singing, *I Wanna Be Evil*. When I came home, she'd tried to dye her hair black. The dye was spattered on the walls, the couch, the floor, sticking to everything but her hair, which shone like a canary in a coal mine. *It didn't work right, huh*, she asks. *Do you hate it?* Her face crumples. *I hate it*, she says. I rubbed toothpaste on her hair until it was back to blonde, and we ate cantaloupe in bed, gently scooping the cool, calm flesh into our mouths.

Stop writing. Come talk to me, she says.

Okay.

It's hard being dead, she says. I never look any older. I want to know what I really look like.

I can't fix it for you, I tell her. I think that this is love but it feels just like helplessness, I say.

What is the opposite of helplessness? she asks. What is the cost of death? She takes the phone off the hook. A recording plays: If you'd like to make a call, please—she wants to know, if you leave a phone off the hook, how long does the busy signal play for before the line goes dead? She drops the phone receiver on the bed. Is there a time limit to how long you can be happy for? The phone blares its staccato call through the twilight. This is always the last thing I ever hear, she says, as we taste the fruit and meat of each other's mouths, as I dissolve into her kiss.

Interrogative

1.

In one drawing of the colonies, a gardenia
overcomes the looking willow.
I climb from ditch to ditch and finger
the mossy rocks. The commander cannot
remember how to make coffee for the visitors
and the trout they bring out of the river
can't be held in one hand—it squirms
toward watery light—it slips out of grip
and they are helpless against its iridescent
scales in sunlight. They draw maps
in slate black on blotched butcher paper.

2.

The pixilated beautician touches
her solvent to rejuvenate the nerve center.
They're holding a radioactive raffle.
I always underestimate the weight of water.
The origami master lifts his wide-brimmed hat
to the lamp. He is calling up the sunbow.
When he walks to the summit overlooking the city
phrases blur together, and this clears his mind.
The weeping crane does not fly forward.
The listless oboist has no note for green.
One cannot ruin flowers, only floral arrangements.

Can't be Cured by Anne Sexton

no lesson/ from the transcriber/ can help aspire

not the text of days

forays

against mores

that takes hold and reveals the hope of the next day

it is the quality of blood on page/ portrait of cage

made with language that brings perspective

directive to thoughts

of great instances

and the promise of the future

Can't-be-Cured-by-Anne-Sexton

or any other external force

divorce

from material

even the written word can't be taken so serial

then what of the Infinite quality of language/ words heard\unheard

(making the leap off the page and into mild or cold bold young 'n' old

adolescent rage) is the driving force?

no course thoroughly seen

by decaying beings

Can't be Cured by Anne Sexton

the lesson comes from within and about

beyond authors/ beyond translation/ stations developed throughout poems

like mine fields

we just steal

from all already lived and written

and even beyond what we do

there is more to see through

more that ever be imagined by stars/ or could be discussed in bars

words and authorship
the furthest thing from ownership
the reproduction makes for
greater avenues
more ventures
and broadened meanings

less a possessor/ more a confessor/ of notions never fathomed

but available in text
none the less
made possible in the
Truest
Notion
by Divine Commotion

with the world of every pursuit/ to create even in the framework of world-
centered-weak hands/a tiniest piece of plan

for those around to hear
at their best
and unlock everything of before
more and more
than ever realized in original intent/ to vent transcendent/ for eternity

Can't be Cured by Anne Sexton
but with Anne Sexton
Cure provides

Butterflies on Indoor Plants

There are fingers that collect
only dirt,
dancing through even the softest evenings
on tiny calloused toes.
When work-weighted,
limp limbs
extend their roots through the floor,
there is beauty
in the dispassion of the scene;
the sickness and the dying and the rotting—
elegant,
sexual,
and fulfilling.

They Who Lie Trapped in the Sidewalk Cracks

Worry for neglect
like
a boy,
smushed into concrete,
seized by granular coercive soldiers.
Nothing more
than a green heap of wiry mangled metal:
A bicycle lying injured on its side.
The defenselessness of a simple machine,
even of one so rustic,
and in autumn,
could disrupt the rural freeze.
Piercing.
The presence of skin—ugly,
lacing
through and around
the bones that have faded over time;
no longer vibrant, gleaming,
now listlessly they part
and shriek alongside a numb, sunlit face
affectionately.
How suddenly.
I am aware of sleep
as The Great Ladybug Massacre
(and cannons)
wake the cats,
who come scratching through the door,
who trip
and tumble to face us.
They stare;
their index fingers, restless,
tap tap tap
on blue-print paper agendas.
Alarmed, we stare back and wait
for the background to settle,

for the source of sex to whither. But it doesn't. And so we ex-hale,
though

We've stopped thinking about the Mechanics of Breathing:

This and *That*:

we pass air from cheek to cheek,

(listen.) (feel that?)

We let it out

after a while,

slowly,

feeling the insatiable face-deflation—

wanting to scream,

to spin tears.

This was apt to happen,

and *That*,

well, he surely deserved what was coming and came.

from Severance Songs

*

Sunshine. We know about that. Light keeps
its covenant with the eye and lends it seeming.
A flicker. With a fiberoptic wand the surgeon
introduced his gaze to a sundered system
of stars and polyps, stray cells sex-drunk,
splitting and slick in secret. Sibillance tickling
the inner ear, anxious itch. Gray matter.
We know about it. We know all's gray
till the sun or sun's proxy peels a life
for what looks back. Uncanny now in the presence
of my mind, bones never suspected shiver
against each other, sparking songs I can almost see.
We know. When I look at you asleep
and your skin is a sun that stares.

Of 'of'

Drinking the adrenalin milkshake of minor fame
 while consuming the grilled cheese sandwich
 of pilfered ideas
 in the blonde excitement of sunlight.

Afterwards snacking on the birthday cake of flattery
 he faded away like a porcelain doll
 in the attic of collective amnesia
 while the dueling banjos of dysfunction played

& the alchemy of gossip transformed the bright penny
 of promise into a leaden afterthought
 by means of the ulterior motive of the ulterior motive.
 That in turn opened the floodgates of riff raffery

at which point the bad loser of lust became
 the clown prince of bitterness &
 applied for the sour grapes franchise of
 spurned book critics seeking dead poetry hegemony

among the come-&-go writers of yesteryear
 who reside in the Rhode Island of the imagination.
 Meanwhile armies of anti-intelligence agents
 neatly sidestepped the Maginot Line of his ego.

A Dog Named Soul

At the art fair I met a woman in a wheelchair.
She had a large dog wearing an
orange vest that said "Human Companion."
She said her dog's name
and meant it. He was everything.

I hate to put my dead dog Otis in a poem;
it feels cowardly and vain, where he was truly brave
in a way dog-people know.

I want to call this poem "My Dog's Life,"
but I only know his life through mine
and I hate myself as I write.

I have a cheap routine I could do
about how his death
reminds me of the brother I neglect.
I could weave in a whole shtick about absolute innocence.
I could even describe the woman's weakness.
I could say Otis is everything I've never done.

He was just a dog (and sometimes I was mean).

Old friend, I loved you, and I'm sorry.

What Frank Told Me

I'm having a real day of it

Washing the world down with rye and Coca-Cola and the news

Eating Swiss chocolates afterwards

I'm smoking a Camel now

In subway stations and latrines

If Kenneth were writing this he would point out how art has changed

I am a microcosm in your macrocosm

You are as intimate as a "cup" of vodka

You never come when you say you'll come but on the other hand you do
come

I think you are wonderful

Heaven Night Club

It is a quarter to 3 a.m.
I pay \$30 to get Joey and me in.
I must be in heaven.

I stand in the corner to watch dancing men.
The walls are made of glass—the glass is sweating.
It is a quarter to 3 a.m.

I realize then that this club is a haven
for bad remixes of songs (e.g. Lauryn Hill's "That Thing").
I must be in heaven.

A guy comes up to me and says "You look foreign."
I tell him "Yes, I'm from Wisconsin."
It is a quarter to 3 a.m.

I decide that the night needs to end,
yet I'm blocked from the exit by a cross-dresser singing
"I must be in heaven!"

I locate Joey and find that I cannot contend
with all the cute boys he's busy kissing.
It is a quarter to 3 a.m.
I must be in heaven.

mex to go

sim ply is not con(structed)
 within the bound
 trees stop the growth
 of machines. borracho's tend
 to blow the trumpets
 in grave. yards under brick
 houses looking for miles. too much
 pac, the voice stares you down

louis ran the concrete
 river from chota
 but los told me
 I live in shy.

cha lee did not enter
 no dragon but painted
 his people on trains,
 side build-ings,
 within city walls.

old woman from lomas
 saw our heart gyped
 because long hair couldn't see

moving shadows on the
 orange juice
 e fruit snapping in ears
 I raided jacks son
 before the monkey went
 loco. black and white
 stripes in the classroom
 said !Ya basta!

The Little Broken Parrot on the Floor

from *Alexandria*

A fortune-teller told him he would die in a bathtub. Everything is quiet now the cat is in the sink. The steam has people in it and through them we can see a city: minarets, small cars moving in a white night, pears.

Outside of the theater crocuses were shouting at once. We did not know where to look. A man had a saffron photograph of the moon in his pocket. Watsen offered him to me and said, this is paris. It was just a moth

Catching Five Days

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 22ND:

Steven's luggage, astray in Springfield
Massachusetts, must be so scared
and cold like lost children in a blizzard
like Mary, Laura and Carrie Ingalls
doggedly plodding home from school
visibility lessening until
I had to go last-minute food shopping.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 23RD:

The last year November 23rd fell on Thanksgiving
Thursday, my Seoul grandmother passed away.
My uncle phoned just as the turkey came out of the oven.
Grandmother hated beef but might have liked turkey.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 24TH:

Close-enough-to-midnight snacks: Leftover sandwiches
on hollowed-out Italian bread split into a toasted sheet
smothered with cranberry sauce on one side, layered
with turkey, stuffing, pickles, potatoes and bread-insides
soaked in gravy (we got that idea from TV) with a side of kimchi...

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 25TH:

Too early in the hazy morning,
squirrels acrobat springing for morsels.
Mom and Grandma worry they will starve.
"Remember when we dried acorns
at our old Brooklyn apartment? Squirrels
rammed into windows trying to get the nuts
scattered on the sunlit newspaper."

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 26TH:

Nothing happening this Sunday morning except one silverfish
going about his silverfish way while I decide how he should die.

a feminine fix-it handbook

i am moving to arizona to rub feet for a living
 this is code for "become a stripper in hot pants"
 take prozac in orange packaging
 and find irony in obscene phone calls from my mother
 maybe i should do something revolutionary—
 give up solid food become ceo of folgers make a porn with ralph nader
 after the skin flick bombs i could write novels
 about his foreskin and his superfluous testicle
 go on cnn and comment on why civilization is primal and why jewish women
 are obsessed with lesbian folk music and woody allen films
 i could be an authority figure for america join forces with thee—
 kathy acker valerie solanas & barbara walters clan
 i'll talk about why men's fashion sense adds
 to their lack of emotional complexity—
 i'll be trademarked i'll publish smut i'll call you felix
 because i know what i want i'll earn the name: maria—
 that erotic french therapist who table dances
 to foreigner and the dixie chicks to find alcoholic love
 my relationship sagas are in all actuality self-help books
 about neediness as far as sex is concerned
 i'll explain how necessary it is to go out at least once a week
 to any convenience store located on a corner and buy
 a fresh box of trojan shared sensation condoms for a sense of renewal
 after doing the dance of intimacy: realize that your therapy bills are overdue
 that you haven't watered your house plant
 or walked your french poodle—mitzi in days
 remember girls: sex is a substitute for red meat
 for the outdoors for coffee and conversation
 at this time you are anxious and ready to leave
 tell him you are just platonic and that you could only afford
 to be his cowgirl for fifteen minutes
 say you have symbolic reasons for abandoning him—
 orange soda laxatives god
 another man with a soul patch a distraction with a convertible
 walk out the door and tell yourself that you are your only hope for a hero

Sirens from a wedding.

1. To call hunger back 2. into the room where she 3. left her three wild hairs was wishing itself on us and we who are full of refusal; 4. To call a three-tongued woman is 5. telephone, no, telepathy. 6. Dark speech. 7. You and your gap-toothed girl led the party that day, boy, you left the party a thirst. And 8. left us holding all those colordresses in 9. our mouths, with our 10. bodies. Unlocking ourselves by it, by the vows of your yesterday faces—having left photographs, having proven us with light. 11. A smile is a violence incorporated. 12. And as if married we bit dust. As if watching small countries glow, all halo and pope, join rank soldiers by the pit stained wall, 13. as if a promise. Things we hold in teeth. Memory left untugged. 14. That's what little beds are made of, to cut holy instances in our conservative conversations, to make babies of our limbs and digits, 15. to thank the god. Call yourself on the box sometime, see who answers and argument. 16. Well bought miniskirt from the wrong side the store, accusation of sniffing, hand cuffs, fur; jail sentences for the lonely. 17. I was the only girl that night, only light, by which you were seeing, 18. As if married, as if with arm.

The Squeaky Wheel

Squeaks. ("By"?). By definition! Like a mouse? Like a wheel (very). Greaseless? Graceless! How it squeaks vis a vis how we expected it to squeak. Or, "Eeeek!" As if there were a woman, suddenly: afraid of a mouse (or just its "impersonation" of the high note escaping her mouth). That *sneaky* heel! She lifts her skirts ("this is getting good, isn't it?"), but the sound, repeated mechanically (it is a small machine after all), loses meaning for its audience: each noise, the spitting image of the next and last, wheeled past in the age of the post-mechanical. Just something else trying to get something else "out" of us, no? A tension. What we thought we thought: when attributing intent was seeming serviceable. So speaking, kneel. To echo locate? To enumerate! Again and again: "I can relate." "I can relate to that." As if the hands of the clock were utterly still, and the face...the face? Moving (so dial), but backward, stuck and then—In sticky increments—"free." *I hear you.* Oh, well. The speaking likenesses mount up: afterimages, after what? "On" the hour a mouse in a waistcoat bowing gravely; a tiny woman, tugging at her long skirts as if she began to curtsy or were already starting the waltz. That noise has to come from somewhere, doesn't it? But it's as though the act of homing in on it makes it vanish or go back to wherever it came from. Where did it (within the tradition?) come from? Can we say it's original? And what (we keep—Eeeek!—coming round to this) did, or does, or will...it *want* ("from" us: the captives, docile)? The speaking real? It can't communicate! As if there were a tourist, suddenly, shouting in the face of one who, hardly hard of hearing, only heard an inability to say anything...sensible. Gracias! Here's a spoke in your wheel, his wife laughs—usually she's frightened (so to squeak) of a mouse, or is it quiet as? We've been wandering these border lands so long we speak an "ish," enhanced: repetition—emptying the sound of any significance—replaces nonsense with further nonsense, gone lyrical.¹ As if (as if) there were a rude mechanic(al), suddenly, a wrench or was it a wench (in another country) to throw in the works of what's working for someone, somehow. "On" call. "If it ain't broken don't fix it." "If it ain't broken don't..." *Fix*—how? "At" the appointed hour a mouse, in overalls, sets down a tiny metal box (lookout, it's the toolkit! gone *critical*?) and, backing away, suddenly wheels and flings his body into a hole. The little woman, holding her skirts out wide as possible, tries to parachute to safety. Harkening back to Marilyn Monroe? And the Challenger! And so on. Another fireball: another leaky seal. Hit the machine, condemned to repeat "condemned to repeat," deep in the sampled beats of its endless spin cycle. Just humming along. *Beautiful.*

"Just...beautiful." *Turn of the turn, now.*

1. The wheel is gone,
The sound goes on—
Light from a star—
And so on: arriving
Message arriving.
Sender *no* and *one*.

from The Winter Count

for Arielle Greenberg & Dawn Michelle Baude

ascent to dust what we bake the engine static that ends the ave. of the lilac cave
 once moose the finch fell out of the painting my arms to match my desk the
 tallest
 ever tree above a dizzy spell

★

the many dusks like neighbor glower finds me stealing raspberries lucky he stays
 low *never talk to anyone near that house* mantis so close to my mouth their
 bodies a bunch of fallen corners

★

george washington up my tree twin arms signaling semis distinguish me from
 interstate friction and the bough that lessened the rumble strips to sleep a *flight*
 as primary as the
 wind knocked out

Girls, Cutting, Everything

Today we talked about rape
And the odds
One in three

And how pissed I was taking out
Three bags of trash
“I’m not paid enough for this”

★

We ate soup on the counter
Our noses running from the chili
Sauce and you asked me about nipples
Yes mine are pierced yours too

I asked if you have any down there
I’ve been with only two girls like that
It was really interesting
More so than hot

★

So it’s cold out and my scarf
Puffs my chest up like those pigeons
Huddling under the heat lamps
I hope my pea coat button
Doesn’t pop off

It must be a little cold in Italy
I wonder if my brother’s put on weight
What kind of clothes I’ll pack
The movies on the airplane

★

I think about the bar and the waterfall
Trick with the cigarette pack
The cuts on your chest you showed me
When she went to the bathroom

★

I think about \$500 digital cameras
And sex
Three-ways specifically
What are you supposed to do
In them just switch off
Or touch everything aimlessly

Kissing left and right and pivoting
Toward the middle
Back to the nipples and why is
Underwear so important

She said the cop asked if she was wearing
Underwear did your mommy remember
To put underwear on you
Not are you okay

★

Counting bookmarks
One is a Chinese man
The second white with a top hat
And archived journals on the web
The third I fucked

★

Today I organized folders
Miraculously didn't cut myself
And didn't talk to you
You said I was insensitive
"You're just so cold"

The ointment on your counter
The carvings over your ribs
Like brilliant crusty red gills
And the inner arm
Little fractions
And itches

★

Skip-Bo is your favorite game
I don't know how to play
Your arms are covered
In cuts as you deal

I buy beer across the street
And drink it sitting on your stool
The ointment on the counter

★

I am insensitive
Today I bought fast food coffee
And drank it fast before it went
Cold

“You’re exactly like my father”
And that is a horrible thing
To say

Ruth from Linden

Farming that high, dry land
was hard. He hadn't much luck
with wheat in that thin soil
but she had come down
from the mountains near Linden
and could nearly coax nourishment
from rocks, long before she
married him, a man
with a long, stern face.

Saturdays he drove the team
to town, went where she said.
She knew which families
had ordered her butter, milk and eggs
and how much to charge. He sat
with his sour look as she
carried her goods to their doors.
The women smiled when they
saw her. She knew the names
of their children and grandchildren,
who was sick and who was
visiting, getting married, or going
away. She had walked these white
and Negro neighborhoods
before she married him. "Miss Ruth,
you has the best eggs. You got
the sweetest touch with your hens."

He sat waiting in the wagon
while the women talked
as if he were not there.
"This is Annie," she'd say,
and they'd tell me how pretty I was.
I loved to hear these women
praise her, praising me
because I was hers. I was glad he could
not hear. He would feel an obligation

to warn me again that vanity
is dangerous. "It's no sin to know
what you're worth," she'd say, and never
stop smiling. Afterwards, she
returned to the wagon, dropped the coins
into Father's outstretched palm.

In summer she brought them
squash and beans, corn
and tomatoes, keeping enough
to feed us through winter.
Some Saturdays she'd add
a bit of her fudge
for a child's birthday.

It was noon by the time
She sold her butter, milk
and eggs. He'd take a few coins
from the leather pouch
bulging with money she'd earned
and say he'd be back in an hour,
then dropped her off
on Main Street to do a week's
shopping, to buy his coffee and sugar,
and a few other things she didn't grow.

Right Before Bible Study with Pasta' Larry

shooting craps
 on the back wall
 at Uncle Ray's house
 basement style
 with Joe's dad, owner
 of the barbershop
 where they couldn't edge
 a fade off if their
 bottle of ripple laid
 on the line.
 Mike's dad pusher
 of neighborhood's
 blow, rock, occasional Colombian hash
 while serving on the Usher Board
 at Friendship Baptist Church
 every Sunday.
 Mr. Jackson, educator
 who often
 makes a 12:15 deposit
 in the teachers' lounge
 one-person bathroom
 while taken sips off his
 vok and oj filled
 water bottle.
 Two other men
 unknown new members
 stand producing franklins
 out frayed pockets
 watching last weeks
 efforts to save for their
 lady's new Dior bags,
 vanish as deuce appears
 on die one
 and .2 seconds later
 five appears
 on die two

within "ain't THAT a bitch!"

"Gimme *mymoney*!"

"DAMN!" "I'm out!"

Larry Jr., student,
reaches for his
green and bounces
out the sanctuary.

If I only had a heart

despite what
 promise a crystal ball
 may claim
 memories of home can be
 disintegrated as much
 as tin can be
 crushed by
 your heel
 (so the house fell)
 and
 the children are
 almost hatched
 her wand has
 granted favor
 west would be
 a deathwish
 east might be
 a good fortune
 the crow has pecked again
 waiting for a rare
 timid king
 rubies are necessary
 for travel
 d r a g g i n g
 your feet
 if i only had a heart.

not every restaurant that attracts celebrities has an attitude

O Hotel Bon Port! (1954) O Florence

See for yourself how the small lichen is
the only garment on the boulder

It's hot, humid midday
a man & another
get into their car in
a dense circle of shade
under a small tree

we went to a terrible place
we tried all the restaurants
there wasn't a celebrity in the mob
tho the swimming pool was filled with lava
rock from the car stereos played along the river wall

"I have no dry ice!" complained the DJ
the onlookers seem as enraptured as they did
hours ago

What is the purpose of a dik-dik?

it often took the whole day to get 1 print right
manipulating the work tremendously in the darkroom
the idea of inner emptiness was devastating then

being inside the construction's hot white blinding scorched
itinerary light nips at our heels passports pinned to our underwear
an odd detail of stamp-sized portraits

the word "kangaroo" in the aboriginal language
simply means "I don't understand."

Deer Crossing

The silhouette
on the
yellow diamond
shaped sign
told me
which direction
the deer was coming.
I wondered
how long it
took to
go around
the world.

“Where did you get your red hair
little boy?”

My grandma
who
smelled of
 stale cigarettes
And every
 flower on earth
had answers to
many questions
But I do
not
remember
eating all those
 carrots.

Road in the Fork

My ex is seeing this other dude. My friend just broke up with her man. I am forking them both. Eventually, all roads will meet and by then it won't be about the road less traveled or the road worn out. There will only be a force and suddenness. Yelling and a stinging cheek. A kick to the groin. No more divergence. No semblance. Not the barest trace except a story told over hot cocoa and a blazing fire to wide-eyed grandchildren. Once Grandfather was the man. But the mathematics of destiny forked him over.

Crotcho

from *Omewhere*

I went to the trees to ask
for the last ashes;
details of the path that blew hard
away.

Followed its shin to river's end,
where the pain of steel teeth reflects
no music.

What else of brown could you not cover your face with?

What else flickers underfoot?

The vine that traps
the seed
damaged my unknowing by coming
here and at last
after the thaw.

fathers aren't Gods, either.

She still has the small-child view of mortality—
never realizing the root-wordedness of Lola or how
well H.H. almost rhymes with pervert.

She always thought fathers loved as lovers love
the naked parts of love and love the love that never
turns into love except when caught by those mothers
who justify like, “She asked to be loved as Lolita—”

(With her bare white baby fat tummy poking through
at bellybutton between the top edge of shorts and bottom
edge of shirt. The now-sexy skinny arms and small-of-back
flatness where nipples rest transparent through that white
two-piece little-girl bikini.)

She tried to think of leaving as Lolita through the
embroidered pillowcase shock value at seven or eight
or even younger, or what the real purpose of Vaseline
was because even at her logic then she knew they
couldn't market a product solely on that.

Tree House

Will you meet me atop the hundred-foot stump,
ivy wrapped, strong jungle of vine and foothold?
I've gotten over my fear of heights.

I stand at the periphery and you are nowhere I can see
with your face askew. You think I love God less
because I pick a blackberry thorn from my thumb.
Because I don't fall at the least sign of trouble and utter
that name. The preacher says, *Sin is in thinking too*. I think
the coins ring in your pocket like crickets cut short in song.

I think I'll never get woman off my tongue. I retreat
to that childhood of you in the bramble
when the velvet bellies of leaves fold against my arms.
You don't get to erase my want. I'll stone here wanting.

3 Imperfect Rituals

press 45 of *Love Me Tender*

to stomach

then throat

then heart

then groin

then crown

dream of breast feeding

Elvis doll afraid of His white

choppers till pleased by His

sucking then remember I'm not

a woman and it's blood He's

sucking but it's too late the

way you know it's too

late in dreams

hide photograph

of Elvis in my

underwear

giggling all

day on street

no one knows!

no one knows!

no one knows!

conversation poem

ME WITH HAT: everything seems so uncertain now.
ME WITHOUT HAT: things were certain at one time?
ME WITH HAT: well yes, but after what happened, now things are
uncertain.
ME WITHOUT HAT: if things were certain how could you be
surprised by what happened?

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The English Department of Columbia College Chicago is pleased to have received the following donations to its Poetry Scholarship Fund. The initial goal of the fund is to raise \$20,000 to provide an annual scholarship of \$1,000 for a deserving student in the college's undergraduate poetry major. Columbia College Chicago is the only institution of higher learning in the country to offer an undergraduate poetry major, which consists of 51 semester hours of study. Further gifts are welcome and should be addressed to:

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COLUMBIA POETRY REVIEW *no. 18*

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We invite all women poets to submit poems on any subject matter for Issue 18, to be published in May 2005. Please send 3-5 poems during our reading period (August 1 to November 30, 2004) to:

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COLUMBIA COLLEGE CHICAGO
600 S. MICHIGAN AVENUE
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS 60605

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no. 17

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